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“Working with Communities to Disrupt Terror Plots”

## **Background**

Global terrorism had reached American shores in the early 1990's when terrorists attempted to destroy the World Trade Center. Having failed in their first attempt, they tried again and succeeded in 2001 when on 9/11 terrorism claimed the lives of almost three thousand innocent American citizens. Since then terrorism has become part of American lexicon. As the threat continues and as new realities arise, various steps should be taken to insure the safety and security of citizens and the homeland. In the fight against terrorism the goal is to tackle the factors that contribute to extremism and radicalism which might lead to violence and terrorism.

Minimizing the factors that contribute to radicalization of vulnerable individuals requires collaborative efforts between first responders, law enforcement, and citizen groups of all cultural backgrounds. Collaboration should be extensive and inclusive of all citizens utilizing consultation, participation and recommendations. A frank and open debate should take place over extremism, violent extremism and the role everyone has to play in fighting this war on one hand, and reducing the contributing factors to violent extremism on the other. Moreover, a conducive and empowering environment should be established for the purpose of achieving these goals.

## **Community Engagement Office Ohio Homeland Security**

The Community Engagement office was born in 2005 out of a need to establish an outreach program to the whole community with a special focus to engage and consult with the Arab and Muslims communities because of the role they can play in the fight against terrorism and the violent ideologies that breed violence. The Ohio Department of Public Safety/Division of Homeland Security recognized the need to develop regular lines of communication for the purpose of engaging all communities to help achieve its mission.

## **Primary Objective**

To reach out, coordinate, and engage the diverse communities throughout the state of Ohio in the mission of Ohio Homeland Security and on matters of importance and concerns to both sides for the purpose of keeping Ohio and her citizens safe and secure.

## Ohio Homeland Community Engagement Office Model

Primary Goal	Establish trust and legitimacy between the law enforcement and the communities
Emphasis	Multilevel trust, genuine relationship between First Responders and communities; empowering citizens to share information
Approach	Holding regular town hall meetings; open dialogue; advisory councils; Imams' councils; participation in cultural events
Community Engagement	Increase cultural awareness; education; media campaigns; forums; active liaisons
Law Enforcement	Increase in cultural competency, increase of communities' trust in First Responders; form partnership with citizens
Community input in preventing radicalization, and violent extremism	As trust with First Responders increases, communities will invest in their security and the security the entire state
Desired Outcome	Communities' feel confident and comfortable in helping First Responders in the fight against terrorism

### Long-term Goals

1. Form advising councils that represent our communities to help build a society based on mutual respect, understanding and cooperation.
2. Engage the community to become part of Homeland Security mission of
3. Prevention, protection, response and recovery of acts of terrorism.
4. Present terrorism awareness programs to the community through public speaking, workshops and training and by engaging schools and workplaces in both public and private sectors.
5. Encourage statewide cooperation and build partnerships within the community and citizen groups.
6. Participate in celebration and cultural events observed by our diverse citizens and groups.
7. Nurture a relationship of mutual respect between the community and First Responders/Homeland Security.
8. Hold regular meeting with the members of the community.
9. Establish a task force representing community based organizations that include leadership of the largest spectrum of society.

10. Work as a bridge to promote harmony, cooperation, understanding, and mutual respect among different religious and cultural organization in the state of Ohio.
11. Counter issues of stereotypes and profiling of communities like the Arabs, Muslims, and Somalis.
12. Establish direct lines of communications with the leaders of the diverse groups.
13. Create a working relationship with all mediums of communication to provide accurate information regarding cultural competence.
14. Offer training workshops to public employees regarding diversity, cultural competence, and community engagement.
15. Create a public speaking program that presents issues relate to the goals of the office.
16. Research, write, post, publish and make available to First Responders literature on religious and cultural issues relate to communities

### **Action Plan**

1. Identify and list all cultural and religious organizations to work with
2. Identify and list leadership within these organizations
3. Identify important members of these communities in private and public sectors
4. Choose contact persons with the necessary background for successful contacts
5. Contacts should be personal and slow in order to build trust in mission and establish communication and working relationship.
6. Engage the leadership in as many meetings as possible to keep lines of communication open. Meetings' agendas should establish major and specific matters that are important to both government and communities.
7. Explain the mission of the office and the role they play in working with homeland security.
8. Elicit their input, cooperation, and consultation in OHS work.
9. Coordinate and plan with community organizations to hold town hall meetings in which the largest possible number of communities attends to address their issues and concerns and OHS issues and concerns. Meetings should include representatives of various governmental agencies and any agency of relevance or importance to both sides.
10. Formalize these councils in appointments and media announcements.
11. Councils should be divided into work groups to address issues of interest.
12. Councils should select members among them as contact persons with 24 hours contact access.
13. Attend meetings and cultural events celebrated by the communities.
14. Work closely with the communities to counter profiling and stereotyping.
15. Enable the communities to represent themselves and make their voice heard when and where it's needed.

### **Youth Liaison**

**General goals:** To engage the youth in a multitude of programs and activities for the purpose of preventing violence and terrorism by promoting good citizens less vulnerable to extremism and fanaticism. The following are some steps Ohio Homeland Security is taking to help in achieving this goal. They focus on citizenry, service, and leadership:

1. Engage Muslim youth in civic duties and provide them with a sense of belonging to the larger community.
2. Provide the youth with a voice in expressing and discussing their issues and concerns.
3. Provide support through coordinating with other youth and service organizations to address issues not addressed by faith-based organizations.
4. Establish leadership initiative to empower and activate youngsters in political and cultural life. This initiative can be achieved through organizing training programs and by eliciting consultation of specialists in this field.
5. Create awareness of good citizenry with focus on rights and duties to confirm the concepts of “natural rights,” societal obligation, and social contract.
6. Engage the Arab/Muslim American communities in working with youth.
7. Engage the youth in discussing and debating ideologies of cultural and religious extremism with focus on alternative views and ramification of each possibility. OHS should develop literature to serve this purpose. Literature should include among other things mainstream Islam and its universal appeal.
8. Establish a list of printed and digital sources with easy and open access to serve the youth on a wider range of issues.
9. Establish a hotline for youth as an empowering tool of communication and participation.
10. Provide educational and informational materials published by a various educational organizations on youth in schools and detention centers.
11. Engage the youth in anti-drug campaigns and anti-gang activities.

### **Women Liaison**

**General Goals:** In the workplace and in popular culture, Arab/Muslim American women seem to be either misrepresented or under-represented. While women organizations can't be labeled as homogenous or monolithic, we recognize the importance of working with these groups for the important role they play in society and especially the youngsters. Their role as parents is very important in education and preparing good citizenry. We feel the need to empower women to be active participant in issues like health, employment, harassment, discrimination, racism, misogyny, domestic violence and religious issues in a free format.

### **Action Plan**

1. Encourage women to participate in civic duties and public service. OHLS should coordinate with workplace in public and private sector to address sensitivity to faith-based employment.
2. Create women task force comprising of members of professional women in both public and private sectors. This task force would work as an example of success to the general population and as a role model for Arab/Muslim American women.
3. Support established women organizations and solicit their participation in achieving Ohio Homeland Security's mission.
4. Affirm equal opportunity employment for women of faith especially when Islamic attire or prayer creates issues in the workplace.

5. Steer the establishment of issues-based women organizations to attract the participation of Muslim/Arab American women so a network of women's voices is heard.
6. Encourage intellectual and cultural participation for women. Ohio Homeland Security helps in providing women a podium for public speaking, writing and publishing.
7. Work with Arab and Islamic organizations to provide educational research on political, cultural and religious issues. OHS should create a dynamic forum to continuously engage women to debate and discuss their issues.
8. Create a manual detailing Muslim and Arab women past and present contributions to world cultures and civilizations.
9. Coordinate between Arab/Muslim women organizations and local, national, and international women organizations for the purpose of increasing the cooperation and connection with women everywhere.
10. Work with the popular media to enable women to express their views and debate their issues in public forums.
11. Create various printed and digital resources to inform, communicate, and educate women on family, health and maternal issues.
12. Facilitate societal awareness and help for women and families who face social, cultural, or personal issues with no recourse.

### **Community Organizations and Leadership Liaison**

**General Goals:** Recognizing the importance of communication and information, OHS works tirelessly to connect with and activate the Arab/Muslim communities throughout the state of Ohio to work closely with first responders to protect these communities in specific and the state of Ohio in general by creating effective security measures to prepare for and prevent terrorism. In the aftermath of 9/11, Arab and Muslim Americans came under scrutiny in the media, consequently, these communities became isolated, secluded, disconnected. Contacts with Arab and Muslim Americans were minimized. Working with community organizations and their leadership should re-connect Arab and Muslim Americans with society on one hand, and with First Responders on the other. OHS will help in countering profiling, stereotyping, misconception, false information, and coordinate in providing accurate information on the cultures of these communities.

The following steps are being used to achieve these goals:

### **Action Plan**

1. Establish continuous lines of communication with the leadership of Arab/Muslim American organizations.
2. Develop a list of contacts with the community for the purpose of disseminating information as needed.
3. Hold periodical and open town hall meeting to enable members of these communities and the law enforcement to ask and answer questions of concern to both sides.

4. Form advisory councils with members representing the A/M communities in all cities of Ohio. These councils should advise and recommend to OHLS on matters of importance.
5. Work with communities in providing the correct knowledge of Islam and the Arabic culture by initiating educational programs, seminars, workshops, and public speaking on these issues.
6. Advise and recommend to the school systems in Ohio on curriculum and information regarding both the religion and the cultures of the Middle East and other cultures.
7. Encourage the communities to play an active in popular culture as members of diverse communities with rights, duties, and roles to play in American society.
8. Work hard to minimize discrimination against Arab/Muslim Americans in all sectors including employment.
9. Generate an interfaith dialogue among the willing to develop mutual respect, awareness and understanding of all faiths. This should be part of a general plan to promote harmony among all communities including minorities and majority and how can they relate to each other. Mosques should be encouraged to extend themselves to the community through open house tours and dialogues
10. Engage the Arab/Muslim communities in frank and productive discussion on extremism and fanaticism.
11. Develop a public campaign for the purpose of affirming the cultural inclusiveness and the right of every American citizen to “belong” to our society.
12. Bridge the gap between Arab/Muslim American organizations and other organizations by steering cooperation and close working relationship between the diverse communities.

### **Law Enforcement Liaison**

OHS recognizes that Arab and Muslim American groups have great interest in a safer Ohio with proven support for a pluralistic society. Enabling first responders in Ohio to use all sources available to fight, prevent, and prepare for acts of terrorism, OHS should establish a dynamic connection with the diverse communities including Arab and Muslim Americans. The following steps are being used to achieve these goals:

1. Familiarize the Arab/Muslim communities with law enforcement work, mission, rights and duties. Exchange of tours and face-to-face meetings between the two sides should “humanize” the other and thus minimize misconception, stereotyping and profiling. The image of law enforcement in the Middle East is very negative and many immigrants still have the same views even though they live in the United States.
2. Develop cultural and religious awareness seminars and workshops to empower law enforcement with the correct information on do’s and taboos in world cultures.
3. Coordinate with the law enforcement to develop informational public events as needed in which representatives of all agencies can educate the public and answer questions on law enforcement.
4. Develop and distribute educational materials to all law enforcement agencies to help as a source on working with and interacting with Arab and Muslim Americans.

5. Coordinate with law enforcement to maintain a balance between the fight against terrorism and the preservation of civil liberties
6. Collaborate with colleges and universities to develop courses on homeland security and certification to law officers throughout the state of Ohio.
7. Coordinate town hall meetings to enable law enforcement to be part of panels to communicate issues and concerns to the Arab/Muslim American communities
8. Work as a liaison between the local mosques and law enforcement agencies for the purpose of working with the mosques and soliciting the help of imams in the fight against terrorism.
9. Engage the American/Muslim groups and illicit their participation and recommendation in the ways to fight terrorism
10. Work with law enforcement and the media to counter negative stereotypes of these communities.

### **Highlights of the work achieved by the Community Engagement Office at Ohio Homeland Security**

1. Built a strong relationship with Arab, Muslim, and Somali, Hispanic, Latino and Asian communities among others. This relationship is manifested in regular contacts, dialogue, and exchange of ideas.
2. Formed Somali Imams' Advisory Group that opened the mosque to our office and enabled us to engage the Imams and the congregants in regular discussion of issues of interest and concern to both parties.
3. Connected and still connecting First Responders with critical communities by involving them in our efforts. First responders' representatives are always present in our town hall meetings offering presentations and engage in a dialogue with members of the communities.
4. Conduct cultural competence training to First Responders, schools and groups in public and private sectors. Our office just completed training 3000 members of the Ohio State Highway Patrol. The same training was conducted for Police, Sheriffs, Terrorism Liaison Officers, Fusion Centers, and public and private schools. There is 100% increase in the number of workshops requested for the year 2010.
5. Researched, published, and posted cultural guides on Arab, Muslim, and Somali cultures as a cultural reference to first responders and the public. Two more guides are in print at the present time, one on American culture and another one on Hispanic/Latino cultures. Both will be published and posted on our Website: [www.homelandsecurity.ohio.gov](http://www.homelandsecurity.ohio.gov).
6. Developed a good working relationship with Somali youth in Ohio. A Somali youth forum is planned this year to tackle issues of radicalization, violence, drugs, and gangs among members of the "lost generation" in Central Ohio.
7. Held first interfaith conference for faith-based organizations in the state of Ohio to generate dialogue and mutual understanding among people of all religious and spiritual background.

### **Benefits of Community Engagement**

1. Humanize law enforcement to the public and humanizes the public to First Responders.

2. Enable law enforcement to explain their work and role in the critical work. It also dispels a lot of misconceptions about law enforcement and other First Responders. It demystifies and makes them approachable to the public.
3. Inform the public on the government's efforts to counter terrorism.
4. Allow the public to have an input in the debate.
5. Empower communities to present their own issues without relying on commercialized or sensationalized media information.
6. Create an environment conducive to good citizenry; treats citizens on equal footing and empowers communities to invest heavily in their efforts to keep their communities safe and secure.

### **Benefits of community engagement to first responders and the community**

1. Effective tool for law enforcement to connect with various communities, especially Arab/Muslim Americans and Somalis.
2. Gives law enforcement a direct access to accurate and unfiltered information on the culture of the groups they serve away from the images established in the popular culture.
3. Provides law enforcement and the communities an opportunity to establish regular dialogue on issues of mutual interest.
4. Empowers the communities to invest time, effort and resources in security matters
5. Enables the government to bring on board communities who sometime feel excluded from the process or treated as outsiders.
6. Allows the communities to have an input in decision making, and partnering with First Responders on critical issues like security.
7. Creates trust and confidence among the citizens to work closely with first responders.

### **Value of community engagement efforts**

Community engagement doesn't replace the traditional law enforcement work. It complements and enhances it. It's another tool available to help advance their work. Investigative intelligence is still a very effective way to battle terrorism. However, communities that feel alienated or marginalized will be resentful and estranged from their citizenry. Proactive and engaging relationship with First Responders will help build strong communities integrated, confident, open, and resistant to extremism and radicalism. What community engagement brings is trust building and mutual respect between the communities and the First Responders. It allows the government to create an environment conducive to good citizenry and gives them a voice in the fight against terrorism.

### **Some major gaps in our current efforts and ways to improve them.**

1. There are two conceptual flaws that affect our work: one flaw is the information we acquired on different communities like Arabs, Muslims and their cultures. A good deal of the information came not from academic sources or reputable research but rather from media personalities who for a multitude of reasons commercialized and sensationalized these cultures. Inaccurate knowledge and misconceptions created mistrust and resentment to the government's efforts to



work effectively with these communities.

The other flaw is the notion that there are no moderate Arabs or Muslims to trust or to work with. Our experience shows otherwise. We have built cooperation and collaboration with numerous Somali and other Muslim communities throughout the state of Ohio. These flaws can hinder the work or the direction the government seeks to fight terrorism and the ideologies that breed violence. We need to have another look and seek accurate information on the issues from independent sources, we also need to work with these communities and consider them part of the solution by empowering them to come on board and help us in this fight. After all, these communities can exert tremendous influence in their neighborhoods, and affect the debate on extremism and violent ideologies.

2. We need to develop cultural competency training for First Responders. One major problem we face in our work in Ohio is the conflicting and confusing information First Responders are getting from agencies that surfaced the last 8 years. These agencies present unreliable and un-researched information on Arab and Muslim cultures through training workshops offered to government agencies. Many of these workshops contradict most of what our office offer to Law Enforcement
3. We need to broaden our approach at this critical time in this continuous war to include community engagement as an effective tool for the government to utilize all the resources available including communities' efforts. Also, we need to learn from the experience of other countries targeted by terrorism. Countries like England made tremendous advances in its anti-terrorism campaign by reaching out and engaging communities like British Muslim citizens.
2. We need to allocate financial recourses to enable law enforcement to work with their respective communities. Ohio is still the only state in the nation that developed an office solely dedicated to engaging and connecting with the communities. To succeed in these efforts, first we need to invest in this work, and second, we need to financially support and sustain it.